

Delaware's Osprey Monitoring Program

Osprey populations throughout the United States suffered serious decline in the 1950s and '60s, largely due to the effects of the pesticide DDT, potentially harmful chemical compounds known as PCBs and other contaminants. Fortunately, after DDT and most PCB uses were banned in the 1970s, the population of this fish-eating raptor has recovered markedly, even in the face of residual contamination in the environment.

The osprey has had help in soaring again into the public's imagination as an icon of salt and fresh waterways. In the early 1990s, to assist the osprey's recovery, the Delmarva Ornithological Society—with the support and partnership of the Division of Fish and Wildlife, the Division of Parks and Recreation, the Sussex Bird Club, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey and private entities—took the lead in constructing, installing, repairing and replacing osprey platforms throughout the state.



Additionally, the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program since 1970 has conducted surveys to document nest success while and U.S. Geological Survey biologists tested eggs and chicks for contaminants in 2001. Until recently, osprey surveys were concentrated in the Inland Bays and Nanticoke River system, but the entire state of Delaware was surveyed in 2003 and 2007. Statewide surveys will continue periodically in future years. In 2003, more than 200 nests were surveyed; 119 nests were active, and 76 of those were on nesting platforms. In comparison, the state's osprey population was estimated in 1975 at only 46 pairs. The next statewide survey is scheduled for 2012.

Osprey Nest Success in 2003 and 2007

	2003	2007
Active Nests In State	119	173
Successful Nests In State	77	136
Nestlings	135	293
Productivity (nestlings/active nests)	1.21	1.69

Active Nest = eggs or chicks seen in nest during at least 1 of 2-3 surveys

Successful Nest = at least one chick reached banding age

Delaware's osprey population has increased dramatically and may be stabilizing, yet much is still unknown about the species in the state. For example, because the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species program can typically conduct only two to three nest checks per year even on the years when the surveys are conducted, exact dates of egg laying, chick flights, nest failure and other key nesting milestones are difficult to pinpoint. That's where the data collected by volunteers comes in handy!